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CHALLENGES OF STATUTORY SOCIAL WORKERS IN LINKING FOSTER CARE SERVICES WITH SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTPROGRAMMES

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The high demand for substitute care in South Africa, and in particular foster care, poses challenges for statutory social workers in rendering developmental social services. The goal of the study was to explore the challenges facing statutory social workers in linking foster care services with socio-economic development programmes in order to promote sustainable livelihoods. Findings indicate that the foster child grant contributes to poverty alleviation. However, to reduce poverty in foster care households, holistic foster care services require integrated socio-economic development programmes. Strategies are recommended to integrate socio-economic development in delivering foster care services to promote sustainable livelihoods.

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INTRODUCTION

In South Africa poverty, unemployment and inequality remain the biggest challenges for development (RSA, 2011). In order to address the social challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa, social development was adopted as a guiding framework for post-apartheid social welfare and social work practice (Hölscher, 2008). Social development as an approach to social welfare “posits a macro-policy framework for poverty alleviation that combines social and economic goals” (Gray, 2006:S53).

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) gives everyone the right to access social security, which includes appropriate social assistance to people who are unable to support themselves and their dependants. The Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 was amended to provide for the administration of social assistance and payment of social grants with the aim of alleviating poverty (RSA, 2004). The Children’s Act 38 of 2005, Section 181 (a) and (b), regards foster care as the main source of alternative care in South Africa which, among its purposes, intends

“to protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support; promoting the goals of permanency planning, first towards family reunification, or by connecting children to other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime, and respect the individual and family by demonstrating a respect for cultural, ethnic and community diversity.”

Social services rely on the foster care system to provide an environment conducive to the upbringing of foster children (Fallesen, 2013). In alignment with a developmental approach, statutory social workers should not focus only on foster care services from a remedial perspective, but should also include a socio-economic development focus. However, the reality is that statutory social workers do not operate within a developmental social service paradigm, because of high caseloads and implementation challenges as a result of an increasing demand for foster care services in South Africa (Thiele, 2005). As a result, statutory social workers do not have time to provide adequately for children truly in need of care and protection, as they spend the bulk of their time processing applications for foster care, recruiting, screening and training foster care parents (Hall, Woolard, Lake & Smith, 2012; Thiele, 2005). In addition, the ambivalence in the Children’s Act (RSA, 2005) has led to the Department of Social Development and Justice to interpret and apply the Act differently, resulting in unequal treatment of children and unconstitutional delays in access to both grants and services (Hall *et al.*, 2012).

Little attention is paid to support foster care parents, especially elderly kin who is often the sole caregiver of foster children and whose abilities are constrained by maternal privation (Hearle & Ruwanpura, 2009). The majority of foster care parents are unemployed and depend on the small foster child grant that they receive from the state to provide for their families. The termination of the foster child grant plunges young adults and families back into the cycle of dire poverty and puts them at risk of not maintaining a sustainable livelihood. Social development provides the mandate to the Department of Social Development to respond to, among other things, the socio-economic needs of all South Africans, especially people who were previously disadvantaged, and the poor (Hölscher, 2008).

Patel (2015) notes that in a situation where there is high unemployment and limited opportunities to earn a living in a community, the social worker can assist in linking community members with public works programmes, social relief efforts and community development activities. Against this background, the goal of the study was to explore the challenges facing statutory social workers in linking foster care services with socio-economic development programmes in order to make recommendations for the delivery of integrated socio-economic development services in foster care to promote sustainable livelihoods.

The paper begins with an overview of developmental social work and foster care services. The next section presents the theoretical framework for the study, followed by the research methodology. The ensuing section presents the findings of the study, followed by a discussion, conclusions and recommendations.

DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK IN FOSTER CARE SERVICES

Midgley (2010) describes the conceptual framework for developmental social work as embedded in common themes, including facilitating change, the use of strengths, empowerment and capacity building, the notion of self-determination and participation, social investment, social rights and a commitment to equality and social justice. It involves the implementation of research results, and the development and implementation of social policies that contribute to social justice and human development in a changing national and global context (Patel, 2015).

For the period 2013/2014, 39 586 children placed in foster care received social work services (Department of Social Development, 2013a). This indicates that social workers employed in both governmental and non-governmental welfare organisations have a crucial role to fulfil in the delivery of services to both children and their families in foster care (Eloff, 1987). Patel (2015) points out that social workers often do not see the link between their social work roles and social protection. Engelbrecht (2008) observes that social workers who render field services within a developmental social work framework are tasked with linking human and economic development, promoting human growth, reducing social inequality and fostering sustainable social development. In order to contribute to social and economic development, statutory social workers can assist in the mobilisation of human capital for development; foster the creation of social capital which contributes to economic development; and assist low-income and special needs

service users to engage in productive employment and self-employment (Midgley, 1996).

Martinelli, Moulaert and Novy (2013) define socio-economic development as the process of human emancipation for everybody and the mobilisation of human potential to this effect. The South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) makes provision for socio-economic rights, which include the right to have access to adequate housing, health care, education, social security, food and water. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution (RSA, 1996) enshrines the rights of all people in South Africa, affirming the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. Within the context of developmental social work, a focus on socio-economic development includes foster care parents' right to development and the attached roles and responsibilities to develop their ability to contribute towards, and take ownership of, a better future. In line with the Constitution, South Africa signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) in 1993, and ratified it in 1995 (Abrahams & Mathews, 2011). The CRC reaffirms that children, because of their vulnerability, need special care and protection. Special emphasis is placed on the primary and protective responsibility of the family (Abrahams & Mathews, 2011). Collins and Jordan (2006) indicate that it is within families where children learn, grow and develop skills that prepare them for life outside the family, first in school and later in the labour force. In strengthening foster care families' capacity to provide an environment for children conducive to their development, foster care services should integrate socio-economic development programmes to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

The sustainable livelihoods approach is part of an international consensus about "redefining objects of social change and safeguarding the rights of the development community to intervene and transform relations between the state and civil society, while questioning traditional development practices" (Arce, 2003:207). The White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) affirms that social welfare services and programmes are based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as articulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). Therefore, it is the right of foster care parents and children to have access to socio-economic development programmes in order for them to secure sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families.

The donor community defines the sustainable livelihoods approach as typifying a shift in development practice from needs-based, resource-centred solutions to a focus on people and their capacity to initiate and sustain positive change (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003). Allison and Ellis (2001) see the fundamental precept of the sustainable livelihoods approach as building on what people have in strengthening their own inventive solutions. Building on integrated community development initiatives that seek to establish linkages with external agencies, a sustainable livelihoods approach emphasises the importance of looking at multi-level relationships linking policy environments to micro-level realities (Barney, 2003). The sustainable livelihoods approach is relevant for

developmental social work in that it is people-centred, holistic, dynamic, builds on strengths, has macro-micro links, and is focused on sustainability (Hinshelwood, 2003; Kollmair & Gamper, 2002, in GLOPP – Globalisation and Livelihood Options of People Living in Poverty, 2008).

In order to achieve sustainable livelihoods, Midgley (2010) emphasises that social workers should focus on the clients' strengths rather than deficits and help them to realise their potential for personal growth. In the context of this study the sustainable livelihoods approach focused on the resources, strengths, assets and the capacity of foster care families to sustain themselves through socio-economic development projects. Taking cognisance of the challenges inherent to the livelihood approach, such as the time it takes to do a differentiated livelihood analysis and financial and human resource constraints (GLOPP, 2008), the important role of social workers in negotiating and advocating for adequate resources in pursuit of social justice should remain at the forefront of developmental social service delivery. In view of social development as a person-centred approach to development which promotes the participation of people (Patel, 2015), foster care families should be included in strategic planning for sustainable livelihoods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative study had an applied focus and used a collective case study research design (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). Purposive sampling (Babbie, 2011) was used to select 32 statutory social workers employed by the Gauteng Department of Social Development, Tshwane Region from the following service points: Mamelodi, Temba/Eersterust and Mabopane/Winterveldt. Data were collected through focus group interviews. The Department of Social Development granted permission to conduct the study and the participants gave informed consent. The researcher received ethical clearance for the study from the University of Pretoria.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Of the 32 participants who took part in the study, six were males and 26 were females. This in line with the demographic profile of the social work profession. The age of participants ranged from 22 to 50 years, with the majority (24) falling into the youth category, that is between 22 and 35 years. Twenty-eight participants had less than five years of experience as practising social workers and in rendering foster care services, respectively. Two participants had six to ten years of experience, while one participant had eleven to fifteen years and twenty-one years or more experience. The demographic profile of the participants indicates that most of the participants had been trained in developmental social work, and therefore should have shown some understanding of developmental social work in their service delivery, and in particular the link between social and economic development.

The four themes with its underpinning sub-themes that emerged from the research findings will be discussed next. Findings will be substantiated with the voices of participants, and where applicable, integrated with literature.

Theme 1: Interrelatedness of foster child grant and socio-economic development

The majority of participants indicated an interrelatedness between the foster child grant and socio-economic development with specific reference to the foster child grant's contribution to children's education, care and protection:

"Foster child grant and socio-economic development are interrelated because even though foster care services creates dependency, the intention is to assist foster care families if they save money to pay for the child's university registration. In that way the service users can be able to grow and develop themselves."

"There is interrelatedness between foster child grant and socio-economic development; however, it only depends on the statutory social worker if he [she] is doing everything that is required of him [her]..."

A few participants who did not see the foster child grant as interrelated with socio-economic development argued that it does not empower service users to achieve sustainable livelihoods; that it is not sustainable and, as a result, service users fall back into the poverty trap when the foster child grant lapses:

"You cannot talk about socio-economic development when you look at foster child grant. If you keep on giving people, they will not protect it unless they have worked for it."

"The problem is that foster child grant is a periodical benefit as they only receive it until eighteen years. This is very difficult to sustain it. It creates poverty and because we don't develop these kids when they are in foster care, when the grant is stopped for some reasons, the family have nowhere to rely on and they go back to poverty."

"There is no interrelatedness since foster child grant is residual and it is not sustainable, while developmental social work is about skills development."

The sub-themes that underpin this theme are political interference, savings and benefits from the foster child grant, and lack of support in the educational system.

Political interference

Participants regard government's promises of free services and social grants to people without consulting social workers as political interference. As a result, people feel entitled to receive government services, irrespective of whether they meet the criteria or not:

"Social workers are not consulted, for example, there are government printed vehicles advertising that government will provide them with food, reaching 1.5 million beneficiaries. One community member told me that this car can cause trouble for me."

"The main problem is that the government do not consult with the social workers on how to ensure a developmental social work; instead they engage

with the service users who are sometimes manipulative ... social workers have a lot of contributions to make. There is one incidence whereby the Minister of Social Development embarrassed a social worker in front of the service users at X [anonymous for protection]. Social workers are the ones who know what is happening on the ground."

Savings and benefits from foster child grant

Participants indicated that the foster child grant is not always utilised in the interest of children, with specific reference to compelling savings for further education or socio-economic benefits:

"The person who is receiving foster child grant does not use it for the benefit of the child; for example, you will find that a child is eighteen years but does not have money in the bank ... Many of these children end up on the streets abusing drugs."

"Foster care is motivated by the love of money. It is difficult to force foster care parents to save money, since there is no legislation that forces them to save money for the foster children."

"We need a structure to enforce the linking of foster care with socio-economic development. We don't have remedies or power to enforce foster parents to save money for foster children. Saving money should be mandatory."

The saving of foster child grant money for children's further education reflects contradictory outcomes. One participant questioned the expectation that savings of foster child grants could give children access to tertiary education: "You cannot expect the family that depends only on the foster child grant to save for the children because that is the only income that they get." On the other hand, another participant indicated that it is possible, but stated that the view of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) contradicts this investment in a better future for children in foster care:

"I have a child who has R40 000 in the Bank that was saved by the foster care parent since she was a child. Just imagine how much money will the child have when he exit the foster care system or goes to a high school. Our social work supervisor told us that they had a meeting with SASSA and they advised that this is unlawful."

Lack of support in the educational system

Although findings indicate that the foster child grant contributes positively to the foster child's education, the lack of support with regard to identifying and studying learning methods to better understand how foster children absorb and retain new information in school influences the standard of their education. Participants expressed concerns that children are not referred to social workers or other professionals for assistance:

"We [social workers] help them with school, but the standard of education is declining. We have foster children who are 17 and 18 years that are doing Grade 6 and 7 in our caseload. We also have foster children who have

behavioural problems and social workers are not informed until the problem is worse. It is difficult for social workers to intervene."

"There is lack of proper evaluation from the psychologist, because you cannot wait for the child to be in Grade 12 to realise that he [she] is not doing well. You should be aware of that earlier. Just imagine a child who is 17 years old and still doing Grade 10, you start to get worried as a social worker."

In the case where children are referred for support, findings indicate that it is not necessarily targeted to address their needs. Furthermore, participants were of the view that the Department of Social Development does not facilitate adequate opportunities for children to further their education.

"There is definitely a big need to link foster care services with socio-economic programmes, but it is not happening within the Department of Social Development. We identify foster children who have learning challenges while they are young, but we don't have relevant places to refer them to. For example, we take them to Vista which is now the University of Pretoria [Mamelodi] for counselling and then what? At the end of the year you have to give a child's report and you will say they are improving, while you see that there is no improvement."

"Our very huge problem is that even if the child is doing well, we don't have relevant places where we can refer them to ... our Department is only focusing on social work bursaries and this seems to be selfish. We need to work with other departments and see different types of bursaries they have. The children have different interests, not only social work."

The concern that social assistance ends at the age of 18 is legitimate and hence the Department of Social Development is considering extending the Child Support Grant (CSG) to age 23 (Ferreira, 2015). This will in particular protect child-headed households where older children take care of younger siblings (Ferreira, 2015). The South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) enshrines both social protection and socio-economic rights as human rights. A developmental approach to social service delivery emphasises the integration of social interventions with economic development (Lombard, 2008). The government indicated in 2006 that the social assistance system was not specifically designed with exit strategies for beneficiaries, other than a change in their living circumstances and income levels, pointing out that there is a lack of a proactive and deliberate strategy to link beneficiaries of social grants to opportunities for economic activity (RSA, 2006). Engelbrecht (2008) notes the possibility that service users can develop a culture of dependence at the point of access to social work services. Hence the real issue for South Africa is how to combine social assistance with developmental strategies that will promote economic and social development through employment and social investment programmes that will build human capabilities to promote social and economic inclusion and reduce poverty (Engelbrecht, 2008). In a study on the multiple perspectives on the child support grant, most participants asserted that if government

invests in job creation, recipients' alleged dependence on grants might as a result decrease (Hölscher, Kasiram & Sathiparsad, 2009).

Theme 2: Foster care services and poverty reduction

Participants observed the link between foster care services and poverty in relation to meeting basic needs and providing a source of income to service users. However, the impact on poverty was firmly expressed in the following words:

"...we are doing alleviation instead of reducing poverty. It is like putting a bandage on a gaping wound; in other words, you only cover the wound..."

One form of alleviating poverty is in the form of meeting basic needs, referring to education, health, food and social security:

"Foster care services include that the child's needs are met, e.g. school, hospital, free government services and the provision of the social grants ... in a way you are reducing poverty."

"Foster care services contribute to the child's growth and therefore the child will be motivated because he [she] will get school shoes and the other basic needs. Foster care service users can buy maize and vegetables in order to survive."

With regard to providing a source of income, one participant said: *"There is a connection between foster care services and poverty alleviation since at the beginning the foster child grant was intended to reduce poverty."* Another participant, pointed out to the special *"circumstances where poverty is reduced, e.g. child-headed households."*

The limitation of foster child grants as an income is linked to the short-term nature of poverty alleviation, specifically referring to the gap in income, *"when the child is out of the foster care system. Whether she [he] completes Grade 12 or drop out of school."*

A key concern on income is linked to the question of in whose interests the child care grant is received. *"This brings us to the questions that if there was no foster child grant, will the foster parent look after the foster child?"*

The goal of the developmental approach includes achieving social justice, a minimum standard of living, equitable access and equal opportunities to services and benefits, and a commitment to meeting the needs of all South Africans, with a special emphasis on the needs of the most disadvantaged in the society (Patel, 2005). The impact of social assistance on poverty reduction is widely acknowledged (Patel, 2015). Research by Coetzee (2014) shows the importance of the Child Support Grant (CSG) giving access to nutrition and education, which is important not only for current the wellbeing of children, but specifically for their future employment and earnings potential. The right to an income is in line with the perspective of the developmental approach to social welfare in South Africa, which is firmly grounded in a rights-based approach (Patel, 2015). Section 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa clearly articulates that all citizens have a right to access health care services, food, water and social security (RSA, 1996). The foster child grant should address the psychological, social and financial

difficulties faced by foster children (Hearle & Ruwanpura, 2009). It is intended to provide financial support to foster care parents who are willing to provide a child with a secure and nurturing home environment (Patel, 2015).

Theme 3: Challenges to link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes

Participants identified challenges in linking foster care services with socio-economic development programmes as the centralisation of service sections in the Department; the mismatch between the foster child grant and the foster care placement; quantity versus quality of services; disjunction between social work training and practice; and lack of supervision of social workers.

Centralisation of service sections in the Department

Participants indicated that there is no integration of services and hence no working relationship within the different sections of the Department. The centralisation of service delivery in sections makes it difficult to link foster care services with socio-economic development. Most of the sections of the Department of Social Development, such as canalisation, community planning and development, probation and sustainable livelihoods, are based in the Pretoria regional office rather than at the service points where the community is.

“There is a structure and systems in place. Policies and structures are there, but the failure is with certain individuals. We have probation, community planning and development and sustainable livelihoods sections, but this is centralised in Pretoria. There is no link between foster care services and our very same sustainable livelihood.”

“We work in entities and there is poor management ... when you are in statutory section you don’t know what is happening at sustainable livelihoods section.”

Mismatch between the foster child grant and the foster care placement

With regard to the mismatch between the foster child grant and the foster care placement, some of the participants indicated that prospective foster care parents are more interested in the foster child grant than the foster care placement, which links with the question raised earlier: whose interest is being served? Findings show that some foster care parents lose interest in the foster child when the grant is suspended or lapses. Furthermore, foster care children become marginalised in the family, because foster care parents focus only on their own children. In non-related foster care placements, children are worse off. The following comments highlight these concerns:

“Service users only come to apply for foster child grant, rather than foster care placement. They don’t care about child protection. They don’t care to save money for the child ... they get angry if the foster child grant is suspended.”

“Within the foster care family they don’t want to look after the child once the foster care is suspended. It seems they are after money [rather] than looking after the child ... The foster parents do not take measures when the child is not

doing well at school, they only focus on their [own] children. They don't even attend school meetings. As long as the money is still coming in; the child will have problems when the grant has stopped and will be on his own."

"But for unrelated foster care placement it becomes worse ... When the child has reached eighteen years they are also no longer interested in looking after them and foster care then becomes no longer developmental."

"When the child turns 18 foster parents would like to get rid of them ... They treat their children and foster children differently."

Quantity versus quality of services

Most of the participants pointed out that the Department of Social Development is more interested in the number of service users reached than on the impact of the services rendered. As a result, statutory social workers do not conduct thorough investigations on foster care cases as their level of their performance is determined by the number of cases finalised. The following quotations highlight the overwhelming challenge that they face:

"There is nothing that we do which is developmental. They will tell you that you cannot report the same beneficiary within the same quarter. So how am I going to check the progress? They are putting us under pressure to an extent that we don't even care if we render quality service as we are working only with quantity."

"Our focus is on the quantity and not quality. We are pushing numbers and do not evaluate the impact of our services. All the numbers are not the true reflection of what we are doing in the field. We are de-servicing the people."

"We don't do a quality or thorough investigation because of the pressure for three months turnaround. They say we should compile twenty reports per month, they don't care if there is quality."

Disjunction between social work training and practice

Participants mentioned a disconnection between their own training with regard to integrating social and economic programmes and practice requirements: *"The universities and the Department of Social Development are not working together. What we have learned at the university is not what we are doing at work."*

With regard to the role of social workers in ensuring that children in foster care access bursaries, participants emphasised their developmental role as enablers:

"As social workers we need to ensure that we encourage foster children to apply for the bursaries. In fact we need to look at the family as a whole and ensure that they receive services that can promote their social development."

"Government is already providing bursaries for all the universities. It depends on the foster children if they get better results. I always tell my foster children that as orphans they can also go to a university if they are determined to improve their lives. Children from poor families they usually get best results at the university since they know their background or upbringing."

Lack of supervision of social workers

The lack of proper supervision influences the service delivery of social workers. Participants indicated that “There is no thorough supervision since social work supervisors are overworked”, and that supervisors are also not sufficiently informed to support social workers. Participants also revealed that they are not protected by their managers. They also reported that social work managers use a top-down approach which inhibits social workers from expressing themselves. Furthermore, participants indicated that they are not liberated to perform their roles as they have learnt at university. The views of the participants are captured in the following responses:

“Social work supervisors also have no information. When you have a service user in your office and go to the supervisor for assistance, you will find that she also does not know.”

“If the Department allow us to be social workers, we will be more developmental.”

“Our services should assist in developing this country. How can we do that if our managers or government do not support us.”

The mismatch between the foster child grant and the foster care placement calls for thorough screening of foster care parents to ensure that foster care children are placed with a suitable foster care parent. This presents an enormous challenge to institutions rendering foster care services to recruit, screen and train suitable foster care parents to be able to deal with the high demand for substitute care in South Africa (Thiele, 2005:1-4). Carter and Van Breda (2016) recommend that appropriate guidelines for the assessment of foster parents in South Africa should be designed, as it seems social workers require additional support and resources to assess and screen foster parents. Section 28 (b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that “every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment. Therefore, it is very important to place foster children in an environment that is conducive to their development”.

Moaisi (2003) emphasises that support for social workers is essential in rendering social services. Engelbrecht (2014) points out that supervision of social workers in South Africa should be guided by the Social Services Professions Act, 110 of 1978 as amended, and the Policy Guidelines for the Course of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers (SACSSP, 2007). However, studies (Chiwara, 2015; Ntjana, 2014) not only show the lack of supervision, but also reflect a gap in adequate guidance of social workers by supervisors in rendering developmental social services. Continuous professional training in the developmental approach has been recommended in studies by Dhludhlu (2015) and Chiwara (2015) for both social workers and supervisors.

Theme 4: Strategies to integrate foster care services with socio-economic development programmes

Participants could not identify any best practice of linking foster care services with socio-economic development in the Department of Social Development. However, they proposed the following strategies to integrate foster care services with socio-economic development programmes:

Decentralisation and integration of services

Decentralisation of service sections within the Department was proposed for each service point, including “a statutory social work section, sustainable livelihoods, community planning.”

With regard to integration of services, participants indicated that the link between foster care services and socio-economic development programmes is possible if the Department of Social Development ensures that its services are integrated with those of other government departments. Participants suggested that the Department should start with its own service sections:

“...there should be interlink among the Department of Social Development’s sections, e.g. sustainable livelihoods section is not linked to statutory work.”

“The Department of Social Development does not have the right connection with other departments. Before engaging them with the different programmes, they should know where to send them after they have completed.”

Mandatory savings from foster care grants

Some participants suggested that the Department of Social Development should develop legislation or policy for a mandatory saving of a certain amount of a foster child grant to link it with development:

“If foster care parents keep on saving money for foster children, I would say foster care is developmental. It should be mandatory to save money for foster children.”

Shift focus of services from quantity to quality

Participants concurred that the Department should shift the focus from quantifying foster care services to concentrating on the impact or quality of foster care services:

“Move away from quantifying our services and do a quality job. The Department is focusing on the numbers and not the impact. When it comes to that I feel very irritated.”

Establishment of more developmental centres

A participant indicated the reality on the ground: *“We do not have enough service providers to link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes.”* Participants suggested that the Department should increase the availability of development centres at various service points to ensure that foster care families are provided with skills that will promote sustainable livelihoods.

Participants' views to link skills with sustainable livelihoods are reflected in their comments:

"In order to ensure the interrelatedness between foster care services with socio-economic development, we need to offer foster care parents and children skills development so that they can be able to sustain themselves. We leave foster children unskilled and with no source of income."

"In most of [the] time we only link foster care services with the social relief of distress clients. In our case we don't link them with any socio-economic development programmes, e.g. in Bronkhorstspuit there are no development centres that I know of. Even if you go to a development centre, there is no guarantee that you will get a job afterwards and contribute to the development of the country."

Developing a database for service providers and users

Findings revealed the potential of developing a database for service providers and users to link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes. The following responses capture the essence of the participants' views:

"If we can have a database of all the development centres around our area. I heard that canalisation section have a list of all the service providers for all the service points."

"We also need to have a list where all the services of the different sections of the Department are listed. We have not observed that in our Department."

Provision of sufficient resources

Most participants were of the view that provision of sufficient resources could facilitate the integration of foster care services with socio-economic development. The impact of a lack of resources on service delivery is evident in the observation that *"you will find four social workers driving in one car for home visits and this makes them to have little time to interview the families."* Another participant said, *"There was a time whereby eight social workers in 2010 were sharing one computer and they were expected to type ten reports per month."*

Participants proposed that all the social workers should be provided with an office, furniture, telephone line and a car to render effective services. Moreover, they stated: *"Subsidised vehicles are very important because the process for booking a government vehicle is very long, more especially during emergency situations."*

Holistic service delivery

Participants stated the importance of focusing on holistic service delivery in order to link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes:

"My question is who do we develop, foster parents or foster children? All should be developed, but a caseload is too big."

“Also us as social workers we are discouraged. We don’t regard the family as a whole; we just focus on extending the order.”

In taking up this challenge, a participant stated, *“We need to focus on the children and foster parents and creating programmes for both of them.”*

Liberating social workers to apply learnt knowledge and skills

Most participants indicated that social workers should be liberated to apply the knowledge and skills that they have acquired at university. In addition, as indicated earlier, participants emphasised that they do not get sufficient support from their supervisors. As reflected in the following comments, participants were very vocal on how they are restricted and what should be corrected:

“Do not politicise our services. What our seniors say is final and if you don’t do that you can be disciplined. Our managers should allow us to be social workers and don’t force us to do wrong things.”

“The Department had set boundaries for us as social workers and they should allow us be social workers and develop our community.”

“We should practise what we have learned at school even though we are limited at work.”

“We need to sit down and look at the foster care services and know what is expected of us.”

The White Paper for Social Welfare states that developmental social welfare policies and programmes should be based on the principle that “all social welfare programmes will strive for excellence and for the provision of quality services” (RSA, 1997:10). The lack of resources for social workers to execute their roles in child and family service delivery is well known. Findings of a study by Landman and Lombard (2006) of social workers employed at NGOs indicate that social workers experienced frustration about the lack of resources and infrastructure provided by the Department of Social Development for the establishment and continuation of community projects. A similar study by Alpaslan and Schenck (2012) of social workers employed in governmental and non-governmental organisations in rural communities in the provinces of Mpumalanga, North West, Eastern Cape and the Western Cape found that offices were inaccessible, limited and shared; a lack of information communication systems such as telephones, fax machines and computers; a shortage of vehicles, and no facilities such as waiting areas, toilets and electricity. The lack of resources in social service delivery results in, amongst other things, poorly developed protection services, inadequate resources to provide other social services to the poor and to promote sustainable livelihoods (Lombard & Klein, 2006).

DISCUSSION

Coetzee (2014) refers to the Child Support Grant (CSG) as a long-term enabling mechanism. Therefore, by considering foster child grants only as a short-term contribution to poverty alleviation limits the capacity of social protection as a long-term

poverty reduction strategy to promote sustainable livelihoods for foster care children and families. In building social protection floors and comprehensive social security systems for all, the International Labour Office (2012:v) regards social security “as a social and economic necessity to combat poverty and social exclusion and promote development, equality and equal opportunity”. The foster child grant makes provision for the foster child’s socio-economic rights as stipulated in the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996), emphasising that everyone has a right to access to adequate housing, health care, education, social security, food and water. However, there is no section in the Children’s Act that dictates any linkage of the foster child grant with socio-economic development programmes in order to promote sustainable livelihoods.

In alleviating poverty the foster child grant contributes indirectly to economic development by providing access to education, health, food security and protection (Midgley & Conley, 2010). However, in order to contribute to poverty reduction, more social and economic development programmes should be integrated with foster care services such as cooperative micro-enterprises, savings associations, after-school homework classes, adult literacy classes, day-care centres, job training and job referral programmes provided by non-profit organisations (Midgley & Conley, 2010). In support, Patel and Hochfeld (2012) state that apart from providing protection and therapeutic services, foster care services are aimed at supporting and growing local community initiatives through community development initiatives, including income generation and micro-enterprises, to promote the livelihood capabilities of people who are poor – in this case, foster parents and children. More specifically, Patel (2015) points out that investments in employment programmes, skills development, public works, self-employment for people who are poor and marginalised, and micro-enterprises and fostering asset accumulation through subsidised savings schemes are mostly favoured over an excessive focus on the provision of social grants and remedial and maintenance-oriented social services.

Although savings cannot be expected from the small foster child grant of R890 per month, this study shows that it is possible when there is a commitment to do so. The foster child grant is aligned with the aim of the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997:7), which strives to have “a welfare system which facilitates the development of human capacity and self-reliance within a caring and enabling socio-economic environment”. This implies that government facilitates an environment conducive to community development by integrating statutory services with community development projects (Landman & Lombard, 2006). The Thuthukani (a Zulu word meaning *to develop*) project, based on the integrated developmental model for poverty reduction of the *Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie* (SAVF) serves as best community development practice example, where economic development does not only have to be seen in terms of direct monetary value (Lombard, Kemp, Viljoen Toed & Booyzen, 2012:181). The project accommodated learners from Grades 4 to 6 who have been referred to the programme because of poverty, academic backlog as a result of family dysfunction or poverty, being in foster care or having orphan status (Lombard *et al.*, 2012:181). The children attended homework sessions voluntarily, and if they did they accumulated

credits which allowed them to purchase various school uniform items with their credits (Lombard *et al.*, 2012:181). This project taught children about entrepreneurship and the principles of economic development (Lombard *et al.*, 2012:181).

Findings revealed that social workers' performance is judged by the number of beneficiaries reached per month rather than on the impact of the services rendered. The quality of services is thus subordinate to quantity. This is not in line with a principle of the White Paper for Social Welfare quality services (RSA, 1997), and its core value of excellence in caring for people in partnership with stakeholders (Department of Social Development, 2013b).

Centralising the core sections of the Department of Social Development, namely canalisation, sustainable livelihoods, probation, partnership and finance, as opposed to rendering integrated services from service points within communities, challenges holistic foster care service delivery for sustainable development outcomes. Patel (2015:183) writes about the challenges of social protection, pointing to one such challenge as "the lack of innovation and the lack of evidence-based interventions that demonstrate the synergies between welfare services, livelihoods programmes and cash transfers." Linking foster care services to socio-economic development programmes requires political will in order to counteract a top-down approach and to facilitate poverty-reduction strategies for sustainable livelihoods. Patel (2015) emphasises that macro-economic and social policies within a comprehensive commitment to sustainable and people-centred development can address the problems of mass poverty and inequality. A starting point in finding synergy between foster care services and socio-economic development programmes is the way that decisions are made in order to ensure the delivery of services with developmental outcomes. Green and Nieman (2003:166) emphasise that "changing the way decisions are made is believed to be at the heart of successful social development programmes".

Findings indicate that social workers have an understanding of the gaps in linking foster care services with socio-economic development programmes, and that integration of services within the different sections of the department, other relevant government departments, non-profit organisations and the private sector could foster the integration of foster care services and socio-economic development programmes. Makofane and Gray (2007) emphasise that the South African government's development approach to social welfare requires that social workers play a bigger role in poverty eradication by promoting the active involvement of people in their own development and facilitating partnerships between the state and provincial government, the private sector, business and all stakeholders in social development. Developing human capital is essential for increasing economic productivity and moving people out of poverty (RSA, 1997). Gray (2006) asserts that social development requires that the national, provincial and local government, non-government organisations and private sector, and more especially those in the economic sector, work together to link social and economic goals.

From a holistic perspective, social workers should practice within several major organising themes which include basic needs and problem-solving, social justice, human

rights and social development (Sherraden, 2009). A sustainable livelihoods approach, as a “process tool”, can assist statutory social workers to “identify key constraints and opportunities for development interventions” (Allison & Ellis, 2001:380) by linking foster care services with socio-economic development programmes to promote sustainable livelihoods. According to Brocklesby and Fisher (2003), sustainable livelihoods approaches symbolise a shift in development practice from needs-based, resource-centred solutions to a focus on people and their capacity to sustain positive change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Decentralising of statutory services to service points will increase communication and cooperation amongst the Department’s officials. Furthermore, establishing more development centres in the community will provide a platform for integrating foster care services with socio-economic development programmes, where service users could be capacitated with skills, including entrepreneurship, dressmaking, beadwork, plumbing, baking, catering and gardening. It will also shift the emphasis of service delivery from the number of beneficiaries reached through different programmes to the impact of foster care services rendered to service users. This is in line with the Framework for Social Welfare Services (Department of Social Development, 2013b), which aims at facilitating the implementation of rights-based and quality developmental social welfare services, and the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997), which states that South Africa must invest in people by developing the human capital which is essential for increasing productivity and moving people out of poverty.

Fostering a link between social and economic development programmes requires critical practice which includes challenging certain aspects of current social and policy contexts (Adams, 2002). The Department of Social Development should explore the development of policy for socio-economic exit strategies from social assistance and its feasibility within the current situation in child and family welfare services. Within the context of sustainable livelihoods, a needs analysis for policy development should include exploring how assets can be developed through the foster child grant to facilitate opportunities for foster children for further learning through higher education or vocation-related training for skills acquisition. Social workers should assist with linking foster care children with bursaries in higher education and the private sector, and with learnerships within various government departments and with private stakeholders.

In order to link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes, statutory social workers need to shift from focusing only on the foster children to the foster care family as a whole. Patel (2015) indicates that families should be supported and their capability should be strengthened to meet the needs of their members. In liaison with universities, the Department of Social Development should provide a platform to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of social workers are in line with the skills and knowledge acquired from their training in social development. The Department of Social Development should also provide a thorough induction of both supervisors and social workers to enable them to link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes.

Furthermore, through individual and group supervision, social work supervisors should provide support to social workers in delivering social services that link foster care services with socio-economic development programmes.

The purpose of foster care, as stipulated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is to protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support (RSA, 2005: Section 181(a) and (b)). The foster child grant could put already vulnerable children further at risk if foster care placements are not made in the best interest of the child. It is therefore recommended that social workers do a thorough screening of prospective foster care parents, ascertaining their long-term intentions specifically when the grant lapses, before finalising the children's court inquiry to ensure that suitable prospective foster parents are appointed who will utilise the foster child grant in the best interest of the child.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) indicates the importance of conducting research for the purpose of shaping policy development and social programmes, such as a needs analysis, programme evaluation and advocacy. Patel (2015) encourages finding the "connecting points between social assistance, other social policies, developmental welfare services and community development." Linked to the outcomes of the study, a pilot study is recommended in a development centre where foster child grant services are integrated with socio-economic programmes in search of a best practice model.

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